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**RESULTS OF THE 1994-95 ILLINOIS**  
**RABBIT HUNTER SURVEY**

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Illinois Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Wildlife Resources  
Administrative Report  
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RESULTS OF THE 1994-95 ILLINOIS RABBIT HUNTER SURVEY

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Abstract: Purchasers of the 1993 Illinois Habitat Stamp who hunted rabbits the previous year were surveyed via mail-questionnaire to determine their rabbit hunting activities, harvest, attitudes, and opinions, for the 1994 season. The mailing list consisted of 2,871 residents, 2,011 (70%) of which returned usable questionnaires. Because 1,027 (51%) of the respondents did not hunt rabbits in Illinois again in 1994-95, the effective sample was reduced to 984 active hunters. These hunters were afield an average of 8.1 days; 51% of the days occurred in December, 34% in November, and 15% in January. However, the "use rate" (mean days hunted/number of days available to hunt) was greatest in January (0.21), intermediate in December (0.13), and least in November (0.10). Hunters spent an average of 3.2 hours in the field per day. One-fourth (25%) of the hunters were active on their own land, 34% were active on land owned by relatives, and 62% were active on land owned by acquaintances of >5 years. Almost one-half (45%) of the hunters experienced moderate or much difficulty in finding a place to pursue rabbits. Only 2.6% of the hunters leased land for the purpose of rabbit hunting; however, 20% were willing to lease. Of the hunters (22%) who hunted on CRP land, 74% thought this government program helped rabbit populations. The hunters harvested an average of 1.07 rabbits per day afield and 8.7 rabbits for the entire season. Although the hunters provided 15 separate reports of harvesting swamp rabbits, 8 were in counties located outside (north of) the recognized range of the species. More than one-half (58%) of the hunters usually or always wear a blaze orange cap and upper outer garment; however, less than one-half (45%) thought it appropriate for the State to mandate that upland game hunters wear such clothing at all times. The most important reasons rabbit hunters gave for enjoying their sport included "having a good time with friends" and "challenge and excitement of hunting". From a general perspective, 81% of the rabbit hunters enjoy their sport much or very much; the percentage who falls into this category drops to 57% when no rabbits are bagged and to 30% when no rabbits are seen. The rabbit hunters were 99% male, averaged 38 years of age, and 70% of them were married. They had hunted rabbits for an average of 24 years, 4.6% of them had participated in an organized field trial, and 36% were members of the National Rifle Association. Implications of these findings are discussed.

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According to Hoffmeister (1989:133-145), there are 3 species of lagomorphs in Illinois. These include the ubiquitous eastern cottontail (Sylvilagus floridanus), present throughout the length and breadth of the state; the relatively uncommon swamp rabbit (S. aquaticus), found only in wetland habitats in the southern one-third of the state; and the very rare white-tailed jack rabbit (Lepus townsendii) which is confined to extreme northwestern Illinois. Although both the cottontail and swamp rabbit are classified as legal game in the Prairie State, hunters rarely harvest the latter (Anderson and David 1991). From 1990 to 1994, an average of 145,000 hunters spent 871,000 days afield, and harvested 1,007,000 rabbits (Anderson et al. 1995). Cottontails comprise >99% of the harvest.

To make sound management decisions, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (DNR--formed by combining the Department of Conservation with several smaller state agencies on 1 July 1995) needs information about the activities, attitudes, and opinions of rabbit hunters in the state. With such information, the DNR can make proper management decisions for the rabbit resource, including the setting of annual hunting regulations. The purpose of the present study was to survey rabbit hunters to determine when and where they are afield, characteristics of their rabbit harvest, and their attitudes and opinions about rabbit hunting regulations and related issues. In short, sportsmen are the DNR's "eyes and ears", and without the information they provide, the DNR would be handicapped in making wildlife management decisions. A previous rabbit hunter survey was conducted in

Illinois following the 1989 season (Anderson and David 1991).

#### METHODS AND MATERIALS

A 4-page, 25-question questionnaire was developed specifically for the 1994-95 Illinois Rabbit Hunter Survey (Fig. 1). This questionnaire and a letter of explanation (Fig. 2) were mailed to 2,871 potential rabbit hunters on 13 January 1995. Non-respondents were sent 2nd and 3rd copies of the questionnaire, and accompanying letters (Figs. 3 and 4), on 1 March and 5 April, respectively. As of 26 June 1995, 2,011 usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 70%.

The mailing list for this survey was developed from information recorded on 1993 Illinois Habitat Stamp stubs. Each stub was designed to capture the purchaser's name, mailing address, and game species (including rabbits) hunted during the previous year in Illinois (Fig. 5). License vendors were instructed to fill out the stubs and return them to the DNR Permit Office in Springfield. By systematically sampling the 207,553 stubs that were returned (total sales was 270,717), 2,871 purchasers were selected as potential rabbit hunters. These 2,871 people, all Illinois residents, were notified by letters postmarked 4 November 1994 that they would receive a questionnaire at the close of the rabbit hunting season. The notice included a form for keeping records of hunting activity and rabbits harvested (Fig. 6).

Data were transferred from the filled-out questionnaires to a computer file using a data management program (Ashton-Tate

dBASE III+). The data were analyzed with a statistical program (SPSS Inc. SPSS/PC+V2.0). Results were tabulated for the North Zone, South Zone, and the entire state.

#### HUNTING REGULATIONS IN 1994-95

For purposes of setting the 1994-95 upland game (including rabbit) seasons, the state was divided into north and south zones. The line separating these zones was route IL-36 from the Indiana state line west to Springfield, route IL-29 north to Pekin, and route IL-9 west to the Iowa state line.

The 1994-95 season for rabbits extended from 5 November to 4 January in the North Zone and from 5 November to 8 January in the South Zone. The bag limit was 4 rabbits per day, with 10 in possession. Legal shooting hours were from sunrise to sunset. Upland game hunters were required to wear a blaze orange cap during the entire upland game season and also a blaze orange upper outer garment when the upland game season overlapped the firearm deer seasons in those counties open to firearm deer hunting.

#### FINDINGS

Of the 2,011 individuals who filled out and returned the questionnaire, 92% purchased a resident Illinois hunting license and 91% purchased an Illinois Habitat Stamp for the 1994 season (Table 1). One-half (49%) of the respondents hunted rabbits in Illinois, and 3.4% hunted rabbits in another state, in 1994-95. Of those who hunted rabbits in Illinois, 4.5% also hunted rabbits



in another state (Table 1).

The respondents who did not hunt rabbits in Illinois during the 1994 season gave a variety of reasons for their inactivity (Table 2). One-third (35%) said they were too busy, 22% said there were very few rabbits, and 12% indicated they had no place to hunt. Other reasons for not pursuing rabbits included age/health, unfavorable weather, friends don't hunt, and 7 miscellaneous reasons.

### Hunting Activities

The 984 active rabbit hunters in the sample reported going afield an average of 8.1 days during the 1994 season (Table 3). The averages for the North and South Zones were nearly identical: 8.2 days and 8.0 days, respectively. Statewide, 49% of the hunters spent 1-5 days afield, and 27% were in the field 6-10 days. In comparison, the annual Illinois Hunter Harvest Survey indicated that rabbit hunters spent an average of 5.9 days afield during the 1994 season; 69% of the hunters were afield 1-5 days and 17% were afield 6-10 days (Anderson et al. 1995).

From a temporal perspective, 51% of the days afield occurred in December and 34% occurred in November. The "use rate" (mean days hunted/number of days available to hunt) was greatest in January (0.21), intermediate in December (0.13), and least in November (0.10).

Hunters rabbit hunted an average of 3.2 hours per day afield in Illinois in 1994-95 (Table 4). The vast majority (82%) of the hunters were afield between 1 and 4 hours per day. Rabbit

hunters in the North Zone spent essentially the same number of hours afield per day as hunters in the South Zone.

Two-thirds (66%) of the hunters were active in only 1 county; 25% were active in 2 counties and 9% were active in  $\geq 3$  counties (n=983). Similarly, the vast majority (83%) of hunters were active in their county of residence, and 53% of them hunted only in their county of residence (n=983).

Anderson and David (1991) reported that >90% of Illinois' rabbit hunters pursued their sport (wholly or in part) on private land. The ownership of this land was further explored in the present survey. Results indicate that 25% of the hunters were active on their own land and 34% were active on land owned by relatives (Table 5). In addition, almost two-thirds (62%) of the hunters utilized land owned by acquaintances of >5 years and 23% frequented land owned by acquaintances of <5 years. Hunters in the South Zone more commonly hunted rabbits on their own land and on relatives' land than hunters in the North Zone.

Only 2.6% of the hunters reported that they leased land for the purpose of hunting rabbits in Illinois for the 1994-95 season (Table 5). However, hunters leased land at a much greater rate in the North Zone (4.1%) than hunters in the South Zone (1.5%).

More than one-half (55%) of the hunters indicated they had no or little difficulty in finding a place to hunt rabbits in Illinois during the 1994 season (Table 6). Conversely, 45% of the hunters had moderate or much difficulty in finding a place to hunt. A higher percentage of hunters in the North Zone (52%) than in the South Zone (41%) experienced moderate or much

difficulty in finding a hunting place.

### Rabbit Harvest

The rabbit hunters reported harvesting an average of 1.07 rabbits per day afield and 8.7 rabbits for the entire 1994 season (Table 7). The harvest rates were greater in the South Zone (1.21 and 9.6) than in the North Zone (0.89 and 7.3). Statewide, 16% of the hunters harvested 0 rabbits, 40% harvested 1-5 rabbits, and 18% took 6-10 rabbits. In comparison, the annual Illinois Hunter Harvest Survey indicated that an average of 6.7 rabbits were harvested per hunter; 17% of the hunters took 0 rabbits, 46% took 1-5 rabbits, and 18% bagged 6-10 rabbits (Anderson et al. 1995). As will be discussed, the present survey is biased toward more ardent, more dedicated rabbit hunters.

One-half (52%) of the 1994-95 rabbit harvest occurred in December, 29% occurred in November, and 19% took place in January (Table 7). However, the harvest rate (rabbits/per day afield) was greatest in January (1.37 rabbits per day), intermediate in December (1.07), and lowest in November (0.93%).

When asked whether they had harvested any swamp rabbits in Illinois during the 1994 season, 14 (1.4%) of the hunters answered in the affirmative. These hunters claimed to have harvested swamp rabbits on 15 separate occasions in 13 counties, 7 of which are located within the recognized range of this species (Table 8). In comparison, there were 19 (1.7%) hunters in the 1989 Illinois Rabbit Hunter Survey who reported taking swamp rabbits on 22 separate occasions in 15 counties, 7 of which

are in the range of this species. Based on these data, it appears that some hunters who pursue rabbits outside the range of the swamp rabbit are likely to report harvesting this species. In other words, they are likely to misidentify cottontails as swamp rabbits.

According to Hoffmeister (1989:138-139), S. f. mearnsii is the subspecies of eastern cottontail that occurs in Illinois. This cottontail is "a large subspecies of S. floridanus of variable color but darkish, with relatively long hind feet and short ears. S. f. alacer to the south and southwest is smaller and paler" (Hoffmeister 1989:139). In comparison, the swamp rabbit is of large size, with long narrow hind feet, short ears, and dark dorsum (Hoffmeister 1989:139). Because of the presence of S. f. meansii, we speculate that Illinois hunters may have difficulty in distinguishing between the cottontails and swamp rabbits they harvest.

#### Attitudes and Opinions

Leasing Places to Hunt. When asked whether they would be willing to pay a landowner in Illinois for the right to hunt rabbits, 20% answered "yes" (Table 9). A higher percentage of the hunters in the North Zone (26%) than in the South Zone (16%) were interested in pay-to-hunt arrangements. The daily fee these hunters would be willing to pay averaged \$14.46, and was slightly higher in the North Zone than in the South Zone. In the 1989 survey, 31% of the rabbit hunters expressed a willingness to pay a landowner for the right to hunt (Anderson and David 1991). In

comparison, 47% of pheasant hunters and 29% of quail hunters indicated a willingness to pay for a place to pursue their respective sports (Anderson and David 1992a and 1992b).

Utilization and Evaluation of CRP Land. About 1 rabbit hunter in 5 (22%) knowingly hunted rabbits on CRP (U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program) land in Illinois during the 1994 season (Table 10). A majority (74%) of these hunters felt that the CRP helped rabbit populations. The use of and attitudes toward CRP were similar regardless of whether hunters were in the North Zone or the South Zone.

Higher percentages of pheasant hunters (26%) and quail hunters (34%) than rabbit hunters pursued their quarry on CRP land (Anderson and David 1992a and 1992b). It is noteworthy that majorities (63-82%) of all three groups of hunters believed that CRP helped game populations.

Assessment of Rabbit Abundance. When asked to assess the abundance of rabbits, 48% of the hunters thought there were fewer in 1994-95 than during the previous season (Table 11). A higher percentage of hunters in the South Zone (54%) than in the North Zone (39%) believed the rabbit population had decreased. Statewide, only 13% of the hunters expressed the opinion that there were more rabbits in 1994-95 than in 1993-94. The annual Illinois Hunter Harvest Survey indicated a 6% decrease in the average number of rabbits in the daily bag from 1993-94 to 1994-95 (Anderson et al. 1995).

Wearing Blaze Orange Cap and Upper Outer Garment. More than one-half (58%) of the rabbit hunters said they usually or always

wear a blaze orange upper outer garment--in addition to the required orange cap--while in the field (Table 12). Most of the remaining hunters (32%) wear a blaze orange upper outer garment only on those days when the rabbit and firearm deer seasons overlap, as is required by law.

When asked how they would feel if the State mandated upland game hunters to wear a blaze orange cap and upper outer garment for the entire season, a plurality (45%) of the rabbits hunters thought it would be appropriate (Table 12). However, 37% of the rabbit hunters held the opposite opinion.

Importance of Rabbit Hunting to Hunters. In addition to measuring attitudes toward leasing land to hunt and willingness to pay for the right to hunt, there are other ways of determining the value persons place on recreational hunting activities. The worth of an activity can also be judged by the degree of satisfaction obtained from it or with problems associated with it. Ultimately, the value placed on rabbit hunting is reflected by the degree of commitment of a hunter to the activity. The survey instrument contained a series of questions designed to indicate the level of commitment that rabbit hunters have to their sport (Filion and Parker 1984).

The first question asked hunters to rate the 4 top reasons (from 8 options) they enjoy rabbit hunting (Table 13). On a relative scale (with 100 being perfect), "having a good time with friends" had a rating of 46 and "challenge and excitement of hunting" had a rating of 41. Of secondary importance were "fresh air, exercise, healthy living" (37), "a good way to relax" (29),

and "nature, sunsets, animals, plants" (25). "Watching and training dogs" (6) would probably have attracted a much higher rating had it been listed as one of the options for answering (as opposed to being written in). Interestingly, "shooting game" elicited a low rating (14) as a reason for enjoying rabbit hunting.

Three other questions asked rabbit hunters how much they enjoy their sport under various conditions (Table 14). From a general perspective, an overwhelming majority (81%) of the hunters said they enjoy pursuing rabbits much or very much. However, the percentage of hunters who fall into these categories drops to 57% when no rabbits are bagged and to 30% when no rabbits are seen. The last question about the commitment to rabbit hunting concentrated on how hunters would feel if they had to give up their sport (Table 14). Almost two-thirds (62%) of the hunters indicated they "would miss it but less than other recreational activities". This compares to 25% of the hunters who "would miss it more than any other recreational activity" and 13% who "would probably not miss it very much".

#### Characteristics of Rabbit Hunters

Rabbit hunters who participated in the survey were 99% male and averaged 38 years of age (Table 15). From a marital standpoint, 70% of the hunters were married and 22% had never married. They had hunted rabbits for an average of 24 years, and 4.6% of them participated in an organized field trial in Illinois in 1994-95. In comparison, 4.8% of pheasant hunters and 3.5% of

quail hunters participated in field trials in 1991 (Anderson and David 1992a and 1992b).

About one-third (36%) of the rabbit hunters were members of the National Rifle Association. Membership in other organizations included Pheasants Forever (4.9%), Ducks Unlimited (4.8%), Illinois Wildlife Federation (2.8%), and North American Hunting Club (2.3%). Less than 2% of the rabbit hunters belonged to Quail Unlimited or the Wild Turkey Federation.

#### DISCUSSION

The mailing list for the 1989 Illinois Rabbit Hunter Survey consisted of individuals identified as rabbit hunters via the previous (1988) Illinois Hunter Harvest Survey. The main advantage of this approach is that most (68%) of the respondents hunted rabbits again the following year. The main disadvantage is that the sample (mailing list) is not representative of the "average" rabbit hunter because it was made up of individuals who had already responded to the Illinois Hunter Harvest Survey which, in turn, has its own inherent sampling biases.

In comparison, the mailing list for the present (1994-95) rabbit hunter survey was developed by systematically selecting purchasers of the previous year's (1993) Illinois Habitat Stamp who (according to information on the stamp stub) had hunted rabbits the year before (1992). The main advantage afforded here is that the sample (mailing list) objectively represented rabbit hunters in the state. The main disadvantage is that a relatively low percentage (49%) of the respondents hunted rabbits in the



year the survey was conducted. We believe that the sampling procedure employed for the 1994-95 survey, while not perfect, represented an improvement over the procedure used for the 1989 survey. However, as in 1989, the present survey contained some bias toward more ardent, more dedicated rabbit hunters.

Although there were sampling differences, findings of the 1994-95 survey are similar to those of the 1989 survey for rabbit hunting activity and harvest. For example, hunters in the 1994-95 survey spent an average of 8.1 days afield--34% occurred in November, 51% in December, and 15% in January. Hunters in the 1989 survey spent an average of 7.7 days afield--32% occurred in November, 51% in December, and 17% in January. Further, 1994-95 hunters spent an average of 3.2 hours afield per day (versus 3.1 hours in 1989), 25% hunted on their own land (versus 32% in 1989), 3% paid a landowner to hunt (versus 2% in 1989), and 20% would be willing to pay to hunt (versus 31% in 1989). The 1994-95 hunters harvested an average of 1.1 rabbits per day afield and 8.7 rabbits for the entire season (versus 1.3 and 10.3 rabbits in 1989). The lower harvest rate in 1994-95 was documented by the annual Illinois Hunter Harvest Survey (Anderson et al. 1995).

Hunters who participated in the present survey were asked 5 questions intended to shed light on their level of commitment to rabbit hunting. From a list of 8 reasons for enjoying rabbit hunting, hunters indicated that their greatest satisfaction came from "having a good time with friends" and "challenge and excitement of hunting" (Table 13). Conversely, they reported that "shooting game" was low in importance for deriving

satisfaction from rabbit hunting. Yet, hunter satisfaction was reduced when hunters did not bag any rabbits (Table 14).

Other surveys have reported that hunters most valued "enjoyment of the wildlife environment" (Arthur and Wilson 1979) or "enjoying nature" (Klessig and Hale 1972, McDonough and Harris 1977, Wright et al. 1977). However, Wright et al. (1977) noted that "getting close to nature" was less important to rabbit and squirrel hunters than to other groups of hunters, which may help explain the values expressed by Illinois rabbit hunters.

As anticipated from other hunter surveys, (e.g., Klessig and Hale 1972), rabbit hunters rated the act of "shooting game" low in importance (Table 13). At the same time, they indicated that enjoyment was reduced when they did not bag any rabbits (Table 14). Our findings suggest that rabbit hunters highly value their sport regardless of whether they are successful or unsuccessful, but that enjoyment is enhanced if they bag at least 1 animal.

The apparent ambivalence given to the value of the "kill" by Illinois rabbit hunters can be explained in the words of the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset (1972:110-111):

"To the sportsman the death of the game is not what interests him; that is not his purpose. What interests him is everything that he had to do to achieve that death--that is, the hunt. Therefore what was before only a means to an end is now an end in itself. Death is essential because without it there is no authentic hunting: the killing of the animal is the natural end of the hunt and that goal of hunting itself, not of the hunter... To sum up, one does not hunt in order to kill; on the contrary, one kills in order to have hunted".

The goal of the hunter is to participate in all of the values of the hunt, such as "enjoying nature" and "having a good

time with friends. It appears they do not have to consistently take game to derive satisfaction from their sport. Nevertheless, the act of taking game on occasion is essential to the overall hunting experience.

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Table 1. Percentage of respondents to the 1994-95 Illinois Rabbit Hunter Survey who purchased a resident hunting license, purchased a habitat stamp, hunted rabbits in Illinois, and hunted rabbits in another state, during the 1994 season (n=2,011 state residents).

Activity	Number	Percentage
Purchased resident Illinois hunting license	1,843	91.6
Purchased Illinois Habitat Stamp	1,825	90.8
Hunted rabbits in Illinois	984	48.9
Hunted rabbits in another state	69 <sup>a</sup>	3.4 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Of the 984 respondents who hunted rabbits in Illinois, 44 (4.5%) also hunted rabbits in another state.

Table 2. Reasons given by respondents to the 1994-95 Illinois Rabbit Hunter Survey for not hunting rabbits in Illinois during the 1994 season (n=1,006).

Reason	Percentage
Too busy	35.1
Very few rabbits	22.3
No place to hunt	12.2
Hunted other game species	7.1
Age or health	5.7
Unfavorable weather	5.1
Friends don't hunt	5.0
Not interested	3.0
Cost too much	1.7
Tired of eating rabbit	1.5
Others <sup>a</sup>	1.3

<sup>a</sup>Includes hunted rabbits in another state, too many hunters, FOID had expired, and too dangerous.

Table 3. Number of days spent afield by rabbit hunters in Illinois during the 1994 season. The season extended from November 5 to January 4 in the North Zone and from November 5 to January 8 in the South Zone. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Parameter	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
	(410)	(573)	(984) <sup>a</sup>
<u>November</u>			
Mean days	2.89	2.57	2.70
Percentage of days	35	32	34
Use rate <sup>b</sup>	0.11	0.10	0.10
<u>December</u>			
Mean days	4.38	4.00	4.15
Percentage of days	53	50	51
Use rate	0.14	0.13	0.13
<u>January</u>			
Mean days	0.97	1.42	1.23
Percentage of days	12	18	15
Use rate	0.24	0.18	0.21
<u>Entire Season</u>			
Mean days	8.24	7.99	8.08 <sup>c</sup>
Percentage of days	100	100	100
Use rate	0.14	1.12	0.13

<sup>a</sup>Includes 1 hunter who could not be identified as to zone.

<sup>b</sup>Mean days divided by number of days available to hunt.

<sup>c</sup>49% of the hunters were afield 1-5 days, 27% were afield 6-10 days, 17% were afield 11-20 days, and 7% were afield 21-61 days.

Table 4. Number of hours spent afield per day by rabbit hunters in Illinois during the 1994 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Number of Hours	Percentage of Hunters		
	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
	(409)	(569)	(978)
<1	3.4	1.9	2.6
1-2	28.4	27.1	27.6
3-4	52.1	57.1	54.9
5-6	13.2	11.8	12.4
>6	2.9	2.1	2.5
Mean	3.2 hours	3.2 hours	3.2 hours



Table 5. Ownership of private land where rabbit hunters pursued their sport in Illinois during the 1994 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Ownership of Land	Percentage of Hunters		
	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
	(387)	(540)	(927)
Hunter's own	18.9	29.9	24.7
Relative	24.3	40.4	33.7
Acquaintance >5 years	62.8	61.7	62.1
Acquaintance <5 years	27.9	19.8	23.2
Leased for hunting	4.1	1.5	2.6

Table 6. The level of difficulty that rabbit hunters experienced in finding a place to pursue their sport in Illinois during the 1994 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Level of Difficulty	Percentage of Hunters		
	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
	(407)	(568)	(976) <sup>a</sup>
None	30.5	38.4	35.1
Little	17.7	21.0	19.6
Moderate	30.2	24.6	27.0
Much	21.6	16.0	18.3

<sup>a</sup>Includes 1 hunter who could not be identified as to zone.

Table 7. Number of rabbits harvested by rabbit hunters in Illinois during the 1994 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Parameter	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
	(410)	(573)	(984) <sup>a</sup>
<u>November</u>			
Mean rabbits	2.12	2.80	2.52
Percentage of harvest	29	29	29
Harvest rate <sup>b</sup>	0.73	1.09	0.93
<u>December</u>			
Mean rabbits	4.03	4.78	4.46
Percentage of harvest	55	50	52
Harvest rate	0.92	1.20	1.07
<u>January</u>			
Mean rabbits	1.16	2.06	1.68
Percentage of harvest	16	21	19
Harvest rate	1.20	1.45	1.37
<u>Entire Season</u>			
Mean rabbits	7.31	9.64	8.66 <sup>c</sup>
Percentage of harvest	100	100	100
Harvest rate	0.89	1.21	1.07

<sup>a</sup>Includes 1 hunter who could not be identified as to zone.

<sup>b</sup>Mean rabbits harvested divided by mean days hunted.

<sup>c</sup>16% of the hunters harvested 0 rabbits, 40% harvested 1-5 rabbits, 18% harvested 6-10 rabbits, 15% harvested 11-20 rabbits, and 11% harvested 21-144 rabbits.

Table 8. Number of reports of harvesting swamp rabbits in Illinois during the 1989 and 1994 seasons. Data from the 1989 (Anderson and David 1991) and 1994 (present study) Illinois Rabbit Hunter Surveys.

County	Latitude <sup>a</sup>	Number of Reports		Within Recognized Range <sup>b</sup>
		1989	1994	
Kane	41° 55"		1	No
DeKalb	41° 28"		1	No
Bureau	41° 20"		1	No
Henry	41° 19"		1	No
Knox	40° 55"	1	3	No
McLean	40° 28"	1		No
Adams	39° 58"		1	No
Macon	39° 52"	1		No
Pike	39° 33"	1		No
Shelby	39° 23"	1		No
Greene	39° 20"	1		No
Effingham	39° 02"	1		No <sup>c</sup>
Bond	38° 52"	1		No <sup>c</sup>
Clinton	38° 32"	2		Yes
Wayne	38° 24"	1		Yes
Washington	38° 21"		1	Yes
White	38° 04"		1	Yes
Jackson	37° 42"		1	Yes
Johnson	37° 34"		1	Yes
Saline	37° 31"		1	Yes
Union	37° 26"	1		Yes
Pope	37° 24"	1	1	Yes
Massac	37° 12"	1		Yes
Pulaski	37° 12"	4	1	Yes
Alexander	37° 09"	4		Yes

<sup>a</sup>At center of county.

<sup>b</sup>Hoffmeister (1989: 140, 142).

<sup>c</sup>County is adjacent to recognized range.

Table 9. Attitudes of rabbit hunters toward paying a landowner for the right to hunt rabbits in Illinois during the 1994-95 seasons. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Subject	Percentage of Hunters		
	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
Willing to pay a landowner:	(402)	(560)	(962)
Yes	25.9	16.4	20.4
No	58.2	66.1	62.8
Undecided	15.9	17.5	16.8
Amount willing to pay per day:	(102)	( 91)	(193)
\$10-\$15	87.3	87.9	87.6
\$16-30	9.7	8.8	9.3
\$31-50	2.0	3.3	2.6
>\$50	1.0	0.0	0.5
Mean	\$14.64	\$14.28	\$14.46

Table 10. Utilization and evaluation of CRP (U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program) land by rabbit hunters in Illinois during the 1994 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Subject	Percentage of Hunters		
	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
Hunted rabbits on CRP land:	(408)	(563)	(972) <sup>a</sup>
Yes	23.0	21.5	22.2
No	56.4	60.2	58.6
Don't know	20.6	18.3	19.2
Effect of CRP land on rabbit populations:	( 93)	(120)	(214) <sup>a</sup>
Helped	75.2	73.4	73.9
Hurt	1.1	5.8	4.2
None	12.9	10.0	11.2
Don't know	10.8	10.8	10.7

<sup>a</sup>Includes 1 hunter who could not be identified as to zone.

Table 11. Assessment by rabbit hunters as to the abundance of rabbits in Illinois during the 1994 season compared to the 1993 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Assessment of Abundance	Percentage of Hunters		
	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
	(409)	(570)	(980) <sup>a</sup>
More	16.1	10.9	13.1
Fewer	39.2	53.9	47.6
Same	36.4	29.6	32.6
Don't know	8.3	5.6	6.7

<sup>a</sup>Includes 1 hunter who could not be identified as to zone.

Table 12. Attitudes of rabbit hunters toward regulations that require upland game hunters to wear a blaze orange cap and/or upper outer garment when afield (Illinois 1994-95 season). Sample sizes are in parentheses.

---

\*Responses to the question,

"Current regulations require upland game hunters to wear a blaze orange cap when afield. How frequently do you wear a blaze (hunter) orange upper outer garment in addition to an orange cap when hunting rabbits?"

	<u>North Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>Entire State</u>
	(405)	(570)	(976) <sup>a</sup>
Never	11.6	9.5	10.3%
Only during firearm deer seasons	29.8	32.6	31.6
Usually	18.8	19.6	19.3
Always	39.8	38.3	38.8

\*Responses to the question,

"In your opinion, would it be appropriate or inappropriate for Illinois to mandate the wearing of a blaze (hunter) orange upper outer garment in addition to an orange cap for rabbit and other upland game hunters for the entire upland game season?"

	<u>North Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>Entire State</u>
	(398)	(563)	(961)
Appropriate	42.0	47.1	45.0%
Inappropriate	38.2	36.2	37.0
Undecided	19.8	16.7	18.0

---

<sup>a</sup>Includes 1 hunter who could not be identified as to zone.



Table 13. In order of importance, reasons given by rabbit hunters for enjoying their sport in Illinois during the 1994-95 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Reason	Rating <sup>a</sup>		
	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
	(384)	(520)	(904)
Having a good time with friends	44	48	46
Challenge and excitement of hunting	40	41	41
Fresh air, exercise, healthy living	41	35	37
A good way to relax	30	28	29
Nature, sunsets, animals, plants	25	25	25
Eating the game	25	21	22
Getting away from work and home	22	23	22
Shooting game	13	14	14
Watching and training dogs <sup>b</sup>	3	8	6
Others	1	1	1

<sup>a</sup>On a scale of 0 to 100 after transforming the original scoring so that 1=100, 2=75, 3=50, and 4=25 (see question #19 in figure 1).

<sup>b</sup>This reason probably would have attracted a much higher rating had it been listed as one of the options for answering (as opposed to being written in).

Table 14. Indicators of the importance of rabbit hunting to hunters in Illinois during the 1994-95 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

\*Responses to the question,

"In general how much enjoyment do you get from rabbit hunting?"

	<u>North Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>Entire State</u>
	(403)	(563)	(967) <sup>a</sup>
Very much	43.4	48.7	46.5%
Much	36.8	33.6	34.9
Some	18.6	17.2	17.8
Very little	1.2	0.5	0.8

\*Responses to the question,

"How much enjoyment do you get from a rabbit hunting trip if you don't bag at least one rabbit?"

	<u>North Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>Entire State</u>
	(404)	(562)	(967) <sup>a</sup>
Very much	23.8	22.0	22.8%
Much	39.8	31.0	34.6
Some	28.2	34.0	31.5
Very little	8.2	13.0	11.1

\*Responses to the question,

"How much enjoyment do you get from a rabbit hunting trip if you don't see any rabbits?"

	<u>North Zone</u>	<u>South Zone</u>	<u>Entire State</u>
	(404)	(563)	(968) <sup>a</sup>
Very much	9.9	6.7	8.1%
Much	28.2	16.5	21.4
Some	37.1	35.7	36.2
Very little	24.8	41.1	34.3

Table 14 - continued.

Table 14. Continued - Page 2.

\*Responses to the question,  
 "If you had to give up rabbit hunting, how would you feel?"

	<u>North Zone</u> (400)	<u>South Zone</u> (558)	<u>Entire State</u> (958)
Would miss it more than any other recreational activity	20.3	27.8	24.6%
Would miss it but less than other recreational activities	63.9	60.6	62.0
Would probably not miss it very much	15.8	11.6	13.4

---

<sup>a</sup>Includes 1 hunter who could not be identified as to zone.

Table 15. Some characteristics of rabbit hunters in Illinois during the 1994-95 season. Sample sizes are in parentheses.

Characteristic	North Zone	South Zone	Entire State
Gender	(405)	(570)	(975)
Male	99.3%	98.6%	98.9%
Female	0.7	1.4	1.1
Age in years	(404)	(568)	(972)
Mean	38.1	38.4	38.3 <sup>a</sup>
Marital status	(404)	(569)	(973)
Married	69.3%	70.0%	69.7%
Never married	22.8	20.7	21.6
Widowed	0.2	0.9	0.6
Divorced or separated	7.7	8.4	8.1
Years hunted rabbits	(402)	(568)	(970)
Mean	23.0	23.8	23.5 <sup>b</sup>
Participated in field trials	(402)	(558)	(961) <sup>c</sup>
Yes	4.7%	4.3%	4.6%
No	95.3	95.7	95.4
Membership in organizations	(410)	(573)	(984) <sup>c</sup>
National Rifle Association	42.2%	31.6%	36.1%
Pheasants Forever	9.5	1.6	4.9
Ducks Unlimited	7.6	2.8	4.8
Illinois Wildlife Federation	3.4	2.4	2.8
North American Hunting Club	2.4	2.3	2.3
Quail Unlimited	1.0	2.1	1.6
Wild Turkey Federation	0.7	1.9	1.4
Buckmasters	1.0	1.7	1.4
Others <sup>d</sup>	7.8	6.7	7.2

<sup>a</sup>2.1% were ≤15 years of age, 7.3% were 16-20 years, 20.7% were 21-30 years, 29.6% were 31-40 years, 22.4% were 41-50 years, 11.4% were 51-60 years, 2.8% were 61-64 years, and 3.7% were ≥65 years.

<sup>b</sup>10.9% had hunted 1-5 years, 11.7% had hunted 6-10 years, 26.7% had hunted 11-20 years, 24.9% had hunted 21-30 years, and 25.8% had hunted ≥31 years.

<sup>c</sup>Includes 1 hunter who could not be identified as to zone.

<sup>d</sup>Includes 29 different organizations, many of which were local sportsmen's clubs.

# 1994-95 ILLINOIS RABBIT HUNTER SURVEY



## INSTRUCTIONS

Please answer the questions on the following pages for your rabbit hunting activities in Illinois during the 1994-95 season.

If you did not hunt rabbits in Illinois in 1994-95, answer only the questions that apply to you (PART I and PART III). Your opinions are important even if you did not hunt in Illinois.

Report only your kill. DO NOT report the kill of others with whom you may have hunted. Your responses are strictly confidential and will never be associated with your name. Since you are a part of a small, randomly selected group, your participation is very important.

If you can't remember exact figures, give your best estimate. When completed, insert questionnaire into the self-addressed envelope and mail. Comments are welcome but please write them on a separate sheet of paper to receive proper attention.

### PART I:

1. Did you purchase a 1994 resident Illinois hunting license for your own personal use? (circle number of appropriate answer)  
Yes.....1                      No.....2
2. Did you purchase a 1994 Illinois Habitat Stamp for your own personal use? (circle number of appropriate answer)  
Yes.....1                      No.....2
3. Did you hunt rabbits in Illinois during the 1994-95 season? (circle number of appropriate answer)  
Yes.....1                      No.....2
- 3a. If "yes", go on to Part II.
- 3b. If "no", why did you not hunt rabbits in Illinois in 1994-95? (circle number of the one most appropriate answer)  
Age or health.....1              No place to hunt.....2              Cost too much...3  
Unfavorable weather...4              Friends didn't hunt...5              Too dangerous...6  
Very few rabbits.....7              Too many hunters.....8              Too busy.....9  
Other (write in) \_\_\_\_\_

IF YOU DID NOT HUNT RABBITS IN ILL. DURING THE 1994-95 SEASON, SKIP TO PART III.

Figure 1. The questionnaire used for conducting the 1994-95 Illinois Rabbit Hunter Survey (continued).

PART II. Complete if you answered "yes" to Question #3.

4. In which counties did you hunt rabbits most in Illinois in 1994-95?

	County	Number of Days
Hunted most		
Second most		
Third most		

5. How many different days did you hunt rabbits in Illinois and how many rabbits did you harvest for each month of the 1994-95 season? (write in the number of days and number of rabbits that apply)

Number of days in Nov. 1994 \_\_\_\_ Number of rabbits harvested \_\_\_\_

Number of days in Dec. 1994 \_\_\_\_ Number of rabbits harvested \_\_\_\_

Number of days in Jan. 1995 \_\_\_\_ Number of rabbits harvested \_\_\_\_

Total number of days..... Total number of rabbits.....

6. Please rate the level of difficulty you experienced in finding a place to hunt rabbits in Illinois in 1994-95?

(circle number of appropriate answer)

No difficulty.....1 Little difficulty.....2

Moderate difficulty....3 Much difficulty.....4

7. If you hunted rabbits on private land during the 1994-95 season, please select the following statements that apply to you.

(circle number of all that apply)

I hunted on land owned or rented by:

myself.....1

someone else in my family (including relatives).....2

someone with whom I have been acquainted for over 5 years.....3

someone with whom I have been acquainted for less than 5 yrs..4

someone from whom I leased land specifically for hunting.....5

8. Did you hunt rabbits in 1994-95 on farmland that was enrolled in the U. S. Dept. of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)?

(circle number of appropriate answer)

Yes.....1 No.....2 Don't know.....3

- 8a. If you answered "yes" to question #8, in your opinion, what effect did the land management on the CRP fields that you hunted have on rabbit populations? (circle number that best represents your opinion)

helped...1 hurt...2 no effect...3 don't know...4

9. On a typical rabbit hunting trip in Illinois in 1994-95, about how many hours per day did you hunt? (circle number of appropriate answer)

Less than 1 hour.....1 1-2 hours.....2 3-4 hours.....3

5-6 hours.....4 over 6 hours..5

10. Based on your observations, were there more, fewer, or the same number of rabbits available for hunting in Illinois in 1994-95 compared to 1993-94?  
(circle number of appropriate answer)

More....1      Fewer....2      Same....3      Don't Know...4

11. There are two species of rabbits that are legal game in Illinois. The much more common cottontail occurs all over the state, mostly in upland habitats. The adult cottontail weighs 2 to 3 lbs. and is 14 to 19 inches long. The other legal rabbit is the larger swamp rabbit (weight of 2.5 to 6 lbs. and length of 16 to 22 inches) which occurs in forested wetland habitats, only in southern Illinois.

With this information in mind, did you harvest any swamp rabbits in Illinois in 1994-95?

Yes.....1      No.....2      Don't know.....3

If "yes", in what county or counties? \_\_\_\_\_

**PART III. Opinion Questions.** Please answer even if you did not hunt rabbits in Illinois in 1994-95.

12. Did you hunt rabbits in another state during the 1994-95 season?  
(circle number of appropriate answer)

Yes.....1      No.....2

13. Would you be willing to pay a landowner in Illinois for the right to hunt rabbits?  
(circle number of appropriate answer)

Yes.....1      No.....2      Undecided...3

- 13a. If you answered "yes" to question #13, about how much would you be willing to pay per day?  
(circle number of appropriate answer)

\$10-15....1      \$16-30....2      \$31-50....3      over \$50....4

14. Did you participate in an organized field trial in Illinois in 1994-95 with your beagle rabbit hunting dog or other "rabbit" dog that you own or handle?  
(circle number of appropriate answer)

Yes.....1      No.....2

15. If you had to give up rabbit hunting, how would you feel?  
(circle number of the most appropriate answer)

Would miss it more than any other recreational activity.....1

Would miss it but less than other recreational activities.....2

Would probably not miss it very much.....3

16. In general how much enjoyment do you get from rabbit hunting?  
(circle number of the most appropriate answer)

Very much....1      Much....2      Some....3      Very little....4

17. How much enjoyment do you get from a rabbit hunting trip if you don't bag at least one rabbit?

Very much....1      Much....2      Some....3      Very little....4

18. How much enjoyment do you get from a rabbit hunting trip if you don't see any rabbits?

Very much....1      Much....2      Some....3      Very little....4

19. From the list below, please rank the top four reasons you enjoy hunting rabbits. (enter "1, 2, 3, or 4" for the four most appropriate answers)
- Having a good time with friends.....\_\_\_\_
- Getting away from work and home.....\_\_\_\_
- A good way to relax.....\_\_\_\_
- Fresh air, exercise, healthy living.....\_\_\_\_
- Nature, sunsets, animals, plants.....\_\_\_\_
- Challenge and excitement of hunting.....\_\_\_\_
- Shooting game.....\_\_\_\_
- Eating the game.....\_\_\_\_
- Other (write in)\_\_\_\_\_
20. Current regulations require upland game hunters to wear a blaze orange cap when afield. How frequently do you wear a blaze (hunter) orange upper outer garment in addition to an orange cap when hunting rabbits?
- Never.....1 Only during the firearm deer seasons..2
- Usually.....3 Always.....4
- 20a. In your opinion, would it be appropriate or inappropriate for Illinois to mandate the wearing of a blaze (hunter) orange upper outer garment in addition to an orange cap for rabbit and other upland game hunters for the entire upland game season?
- Appropriate...1 Inappropriate...2 Undecided...3
21. How many years have you hunted rabbits? Number of years \_\_\_\_\_
22. How old were you on your last birthday? Years of age \_\_\_\_\_
23. What is your gender? (circle appropriate one) Male Female
24. What is your marital status? (circle number of appropriate answer)
- Married...1 Never married.....2
- Widowed...3 Divorced or separated..4
25. Are you a member of any of the following sportsmen's organizations that represent your hunting interests in Illinois?  
(circle number of all appropriate answers)
- |                                   | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------|
| Quail Unlimited.....              | 1.....     | 2.....    |
| Illinois Wildlife Federation..... | 1.....     | 2.....    |
| Pheasants Forever.....            | 1.....     | 2.....    |
| National Rifle Association.....   | 1.....     | 2.....    |
- Other (write in)\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your cooperation.  
POSTAGE IS PREPAID





# Illinois Department of Conservation

LINCOLN TOWER PLAZA • 524 SOUTH SECOND STREET • SPRINGFIELD 62701-1787

CHICAGO OFFICE • ROOM 4-300 • 100 WEST RANDOLPH • CHICAGO 60601

Brent Manning, Director

John W. Comerio, Deputy Director

Bruce F. Clay, Assistant Director

Dear Fellow Sportsman:

You are one of a select group of Illinoisans asked to furnish information on your rabbit hunting activities during the past hunting season. You were selected because you indicated on your 1993 Illinois Habitat Stamp stub that you are a rabbit hunter.

The information supplied by you and other selected hunters is vital to the management of Illinois rabbits. Our goals are to safeguard rabbit populations, to grant maximum rabbit hunting opportunity to licensed hunters, and to maintain an attractive level of hunter success.

The information you provide will be used to better understand the characteristics of our rabbit population and our rabbit hunters. It also will help us understand how rabbit hunters view their sport.

Your reply is very important, even if you did not hunt rabbits or were not successful. Only a limited number of rabbit hunters can be contacted, therefore, your response is urgently needed.

Please take a few minutes to fill out the parts of the questionnaire that apply to you. If you do not remember exact figures, please give your best estimate.

Drop the completed questionnaire in the mail. Postage is prepaid.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey M. Ver Steeg  
Chief

Division of Wildlife Resources

JMV:LD:ld

Enclosure

Figure 2. The letter that accompanied the first mailing of the questionnaire.



# Illinois Department of Conservation

LINCOLN TOWER PLAZA • 524 SOUTH SECOND STREET • SPRINGFIELD 62701-1787

CHICAGO OFFICE • ROOM 4-300 • 100 WEST RANDOLPH • CHICAGO 60601

Brent Manning, Director

John W. Comerio, Deputy Director

Bruce F. Clay, Assistant Director

Dear Fellow Sportsman:

Recently we mailed you a Rabbit Hunter Questionnaire, and requested that you fill it out and return it as soon as possible. We have not received your form at this time. Perhaps you have misplaced the questionnaire or haven't found time to complete it.

We are enclosing another questionnaire which we hope you will complete and return to us. If you have already returned a questionnaire, please discard this one. The information supplied by you and other rabbit hunters being sampled will be of great value to the Department of Conservation in better directing the management of our cottontail rabbit resources.

Please fill out the questionnaire completely and return it even if you did not hunt rabbits or were not successful.

Please drop the completed questionnaire in the mail. Postage is prepaid. Your prompt attention will be sincerely appreciated.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey M. Van Steeg  
Chief

Division of Wildlife Resources

JMV:LD:ld

Enclosure

Figure 3. The letter that accompanied the second mailing of the questionnaire.



# Illinois Department of Conservation

LINCOLN TOWER PLAZA • 524 SOUTH SECOND STREET • SPRINGFIELD 62701-1787

CHICAGO OFFICE • ROOM 4-300 • 100 WEST RANDOLPH • CHICAGO 60601

Brent Manning, Director

John W. Comerio, Deputy Director

Bruce F. Clay, Assistant Director

Dear Fellow Sportsman:

This letter is to remind you that we still would like to receive a report of your rabbit hunting activities for the past season. We don't like to keep bothering you, but this information is very important and only you can supply it.

Another copy of the questionnaire is enclosed. We hope you will complete it and return it as soon as possible. If you have already returned a questionnaire, please discard this one. Your response is needed, even though you did not hunt rabbits or had an unsuccessful season.

Postage is prepaid for returning the questionnaire. Please drop the completed questionnaire in the mail. Your prompt attention will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey M. Ver Steeg  
Chief

Division of Wildlife Resources

JMV:LD:ld

Enclosure

Figure 4. The letter that accompanied the third mailing of the questionnaire.

<b>Habitat Stamp ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION 1993</b>		<b>310799</b>
Name	County of Residence	<b>*Check species hunted last season</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Rabbit <input type="checkbox"/> Quail <input type="checkbox"/> Pheasant <input type="checkbox"/> Squirrels <input type="checkbox"/> Furbearers <input type="checkbox"/> Crow <input type="checkbox"/> Doves <input type="checkbox"/> Woodcock <input type="checkbox"/> Partridge <input type="checkbox"/> Groundhog <input type="checkbox"/> Trapped for Furbearers
Address	City, State & Zip Code	
Signature of Applicant	Date	
(This Stub To Be Returned To Department)		

  

<b>Habitat Stamp ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION 1993</b>		<b>310800</b>
Name	County of Residence	<b>*Check species hunted last season</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Rabbit <input type="checkbox"/> Quail <input type="checkbox"/> Pheasant <input type="checkbox"/> Squirrels <input type="checkbox"/> Furbearers <input type="checkbox"/> Crow <input type="checkbox"/> Doves <input type="checkbox"/> Woodcock <input type="checkbox"/> Partridge <input type="checkbox"/> Groundhog <input type="checkbox"/> Trapped for Furbearers
Address	City, State & Zip Code	
Signature of Applicant	Date	
(This Stub To Be Returned To Department)		

Figure 5. The stubs that were attached to the 1993 Illinois Habitat Stamps.

**The Department of Conservation is asking for assistance. Please keep an accurate record of the number of days you hunt and the number of rabbits you harvest.**

**Thank you for your cooperation.**

The Illinois Department of Conservation receives Federal financial assistance and therefore must comply with the federal anti-discrimination laws. In compliance with the Illinois Human Rights Act, the Illinois Constitution, Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, and the U.S. Constitution, the Illinois Department of Conservation does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, national origin, age, or disability. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity, or facility please contact the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, Department of Conservation, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62701-1787, 217/782-7616 or the Office of Human Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington, D.C. 20240.

IL 422-0719

[illegible]

### Season Totals

Figure 6. The preseason notice that was sent to persons on the mailing list for the 1994-95 Illinois Rabbit Hunter Survey.

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